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# Decolonising Namibian Arts and Design through Improvisation

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The research investigates the role of service design and improvisation as decolonising practice. It is based on case study research with a focus group consisting of Namibian artists, designers, artisans and arts organisations who participated in artistic and cultural exchange activities of the Art South-South Trust (ASST), a start-up Namibian not for profit (NFP) organisation. The goal of ASST was to increase visibility of the focus group members, enable global exposure and create an arena for multi-vocality. The paper creates a practical framework for decolonising practices in Namibian arts and design by drawing on reflective practice to analyse the activities of ASST alongside interview data collected from Namibian and Australian partner organisations and participants in the program. Critical thinking is used to evaluate the impact of realised activities and processes both in situ in Namibia and in exchange in Australia. This paper explores practices that can enable decolonising processes in Namibian arts and design spheres.

Keywords: Namibia, decolonising design, service design, improvisation

## Introduction

The role of service design in the Namibian not for profit arts and design sectors received little attention in scholarly research. Notable studies, nevertheless, include the PhD thesis of Miettinen (2007) that investigated the role of culturally-focused service design in Namibian craft communities and tourism services, and Sarantou's (2014) PhD thesis, which mapped Namibian art and design through a postcolonial lens with a focus on narrative in practice, marketing and sustainability. In post-independent Namibia the art and design "world" (Becker, 1976, p.123) continues to grow and reinvent itself despite the country's three periods of colonisation that caused communities to live in isolation prior to independence in 1990 (Mans, 2003; Melber, 2003).

Namibian arts and design practices are influenced by two systems of knowledge (Palumbo, 2005). One knowledge system derived from the African cultures who are indigenous to Namibia, as well as those who inhabited the area before colonialism. The other system of knowledge is based on Western knowledge systems that infiltrated Namibia through the influence of missionaries and after 1894, colonisation (Walker, 2002). Both systems have contributed to bold innovations and reinventions, evidenced in areas such as architecture and cardboard printing (Palumbo, 2005). Therefore, the blurring of these systems occurred over many decades, but especially after the country's independence, the reinvention of Namibian identities inspired artistic creation, especially in art and design genres such as fashion, jewellery and textile design (Sarantou, 2014).

Namibian artefact making is holistic and makers are not distanced from their making processes and environments, nor from the textilities of their raw materials. Rather, they are deeply involved in their



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procedures, materials and social realities during making (Sarantou, 2014). That is why Namibian artists and designer-makers regularly draw on, and learn from improvised processes, because they are regularly confronted with design problems (Sarantou, 2018). In Namibian design communities, making techniques are guided by experimentation on the one hand and traditions on the other. The wide use of improvisatory practices confirm Montuori's (2008) argument that improvisation is a forward going process of making that is underpinned by experience, traditions and risk taking during experimentation. In Namibia, improvisation is often a response to pressing demands and notions of "having to do what needs to be done" (Sarantou, 2014, p. 251; Sarantou, 2018). Recognising the role of improvisation in the sustainable development of Namibian arts and design, and documenting and learning from Namibian arts and design practitioners, would open up opportunities for new service developments that are lacking in this world. Paying attention and value to the improvisatory practice as an important function within design thinking activity, and in a context with limited resources, can redirect discussions of limitations to that of innovation. This would shift the position of local artists and designers from the discussion on "development" into the sphere of innovation and resourcefulness.

Namibian arts and design is generally not well represented in Southern Africa, let alone in the Southern African region or internationally (Sarantou, 2014). Some organisations and a few projects attempted to represent Namibian artists and their works internationally, but their practices were usually short-lived and thus unsustainable (Sarantou, 2014). Additionally, unsustainable practices are followed to support arts and cultural institutions and artists and designers. For example, the total national funding awarded by the National Arts Council of Namibia to local artists and designers for the delivery of new projects and work in the 2017/2018 period equalled 3,172,962.64 Namibian Dollars (around 200,300.00 Euro) (Namibian Arts Council, 2018; New Era Live, 2017).

Due to the lack of strong and well-coordinated research as well as policy development and implementation on a national level, an approach is needed that explores the needs of suitable services for Namibian arts and design worlds. Opportunities offered through online services remain largely untapped, with only a few organisations, businesses and individuals utilising technologically enabled avenues for representing Namibian arts and design. Thus, new service approaches are needed for opportunities that will sustain this world. Instead of tackling the problem top-down, this paper seeks to explore different possibilities for new services based on Namibian local knowledge and culture.

The question this paper addresses is: "How can the sustainable participation of Namibian practitioners in arts and design be enabled?" and "What kind of design practices enable decolonising processes with local Namibian communities?" The paper seeks to explore these questions through a case study of ASST that has the vision to grow Namibian art worlds (Art South-South, 2014). The Trust implemented an arts and design exchange programme between Namibia and Australia (2013 – 2017). The programme included collaborations with several Namibian and Australian arts organisations to facilitate services with Namibian artists and designers, including exhibitions, sales of their work, participation in artist residencies and the facilitation of art workshops in urban and regional South Australia.

Since the establishment of ASST the Trust initiated successful services to Namibian artists and designers, including a cross-collaborative exchange program that focuses on exhibitions, workshops and product sales. Similar to most NFP organisations, ASST faces strong competition in increasingly volatile product and service markets with increasing competition for donors' funds (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006). The first section of the paper provides a theoretical framework, a description of the case study and the data collection and analysis, followed by a discussion on the key findings.

## **Theoretical considerations**

### *Decolonising design*

Decolonisation continues to be informed by postcolonial critique (Venn, 2006), which "takes for granted the argument that the forces that established the Western form of colonialism and imperialism continue to operate, often in altered forms, through mutations in local circumstances, and through different apparatuses" (p.3). As an oppositional standpoint theory, postcolonial critique seeks to question dominant narratives and relationships of power that exist in various overlapping social forms that are marked by gender and "communalist ethnic oppressions" (p. 3). Tlostanova (2017) posits that the "Western/Northern" subject "occupies a delocalised and disembodied vantage point that eliminates other possible ways to produce, transmit and represent knowledge" (p. 52). Decolonising practices therefore needs to induce alternative

knowledge systems and ways of knowing. Moreover, research is underpinned by colonial power structures. It is “one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realised” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 7). Therefore, research itself needs decolonising practices for sustainable futures. Daniels (2011) highlights the challenges involved in research that is executed by the ‘North’ in research fields in the ‘South’ due to the dominant structures that underpin academic research. The problem is well-defined as the reliance on “partial and so-called objective knowledge [that frames] the research at the expense of silencing voices and submerging data” (p. 7). Among other methods, the role of research based on storytelling and interviewing have become important in postcolonial contexts as it provides avenues for giving a voice to the participants.

For this particular article, it is essential to mention that design innovation has been argued to inadvertently perpetuate colonial and imperialistic ways (Tunstall, 2013). Tunstall highlights how these issues are reflected within design innovation practices, such as a) the segregation of ‘traditional craft’ and ‘modern design’, therefore ignoring other intrinsic forms of design innovation among local communities; b) the perception that design thinking is “a progressive narrative of global salvation” and ignoring “alternative of thinking and knowing” (p.235); c) by venerating European, Euro-American, and Japanese design; and d) the way design innovation project outcomes most often still prototypes, “[limiting] the positive impact on communities” (Tunstall, 2013, p.235). The author advances that “designers in India and Africa have creatively responded to the challenges posed to their communities, often in connection with processes of imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism” (Tunstall, 2013, p.236). Thinking about decolonising design practices highlights the importance of the agency question, asks for change, rethinking, reconsiderations of dominant perceptions and narratives, and, ultimately, the rethinking of our existence (Tlostanova, 2017).

Furthermore, decolonising design deeply embeds the values of feminist and postcolonial theories into design practices. However, Raghuram et al. (2009) suggest that designers need the “recognition of postcolonial interaction” by leaving responsibility open to the multiple meanings that it may adopt in various contexts, spaces and places (p.1). This opens up the questions around agency and careful considerations need to be given regarding who takes responsibility, and for what. Responsibility, especially of local actions, should be approached with a focus on “interdependence and coexistence [by making] apparent the potential connections between responsibility, care and power, at a variety of scales” (Raghuram et al. 2009, p. 23). For example, Hamdi (2010) posits that responsibility for the implementation of development actions should remain with the communities.

### *Service design and improvisation*

Service design has developed within the last two decades, so it is still viewed as an emerging area in design. Ryttilahti et al. (2015) describes the brief history of service design originating within interaction design and cognitive psychology. The theoretical landscape of service design includes the areas of value co-creation, design research, user experience, learning and citizen engagement as core competence areas of service design (Ryttilahti et al., 2015). The service design approach has been recognised in the area of interaction design (Holmlid, 2009), design policy preparation and implementation (Jäppinen & Miettinen, 2015), social innovation (Jegou & Manzini, 2008; Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011) and business service experience design (Kukk, Leppiman & Pohjola, 2015). These developments lead to the versatile theoretical landscape of service design.

Service design is a strategic activity (Sangiorgi, 2012; Wetter-Edman, 2012) that helps develop and manage the service experience. The field has become a conceptual platform for holistic user-centric development work, in which both internal and external stakeholders of organisations are involved in the earliest phases of the design process (Miettinen & Koivisto, 2009; Miettinen, Rontti & Jeminen, 2014). As service design addresses projects in a holistic and user-centered manner, co-creation is also a fundamental aspect of the practice (Stickdorn et al., 2016); this is reflected through a multitude of methods used by professionals. Indeed, as put forward by Corubulo, Selloni and Seravalli (2018), the complex socio-technical contexts of designing services call for engaging and participative approaches that involve multiple stakeholders.

For instance, Participatory Service Design (PSD) can offer new models for improving local development for social innovation. It helps in considering economic development, policy development, strategic management, contextual understanding of the development setting, the sense of ownership and commitment when working with social design and innovation, and design that enables societal change (Miettinen, 2007). PSD manifests itself as a collaborative activity (Sanders & Stappers, 2008), in which power relations are carefully considered (Ehn, 2017) and the designer’s role is facilitative (Howard & Melles, 2011). Thus, PSD can be an effective

medium both for marginalised communities to voice their stories and for members of the mainstream society to educate themselves about issues that are important for communities existing on the peripheries.

Furthermore, the role of improvisation in the development and performance of services is acknowledged (John, Grove & Fisk, 2006; Penin & Tonkinwise, 2009; Edvardsson, Haglund & Mattsson, 1995). Improvised outcomes, including services, are determined by a various set of choices made along the journey. Improvisation is 'embedded in the context' of the performative (Lewis & Piekut, 2016). This, it can realise, through action and reinventions, new user journeys. Improvisation offers exciting solutions to design challenges due to the unspecified process paths participants will embark on. Improvisation is 'path dependent', thus it can unfold in a myriad of ways and possibilities (Burrows & Reed 2016, p. 397). This is why improvisation is an increasingly popular action approach in service design user journey workshops and experiments when new services are developed with users and communities.

Again, improvisation is strongly associated with problem solving and acting in the 'now' or in a moment of time (Peters, 2009; Montuori, 2003; Nachmanovitch, 1990). In organisational theory the value of improvisation is recognised as a flexible, more informal approach that includes members of the organization in problem solving through acting in real time to develop strategies or structures (Ingram & Duggan, 2016). Thus, teams can explore real options, in real time. In doing so, participants are more likely to consider alternative and perhaps creative options as they draw on ideas that are usually unfamiliar at the time. Improvisation depends on the affordances in the environment (Richards, 2006, p. 381). This means that problem solvers can only work in the present moment with the options available in their specific environment.

Sennet (2008) briefly discusses improvisation as an avenue for makers to 'mark their presence' in a place or space, whilst it also involves 'skills that can be developed and improved', allowing people to better negotiate borders and edges (p. 237). Richards (2016) links improvisation to experimenting, explaining that improvised experiments afford lessons and stimulates learning. Similar to Sarantou's (2014; 2018) argument, Richards (2016) illustrates the role of improvisation in shifting cultivation in Sierra Leone. He argues that improvisation is contrasted with organisation and planning, but the purpose of improvisation is often overlooked, which is to bring together and solve incompatibilities and unfamiliarities. Consequently it is associated with long term survival strategies (Richards, 2016) and responses to pressing demands (Sarantou, 2014). For these reasons, the paper suggests that improvisation is a promising decolonising method to be explored in design processes, as it can induce alternative knowledge systems, plural ways of knowing and learning, in addition to enabling the negotiation of peripheries.

## **Case study method, data collection and analysis**

The purpose of a case study is to establish rich and in-depth understanding of phenomena that are usually ill-defined in a real-world context (Yin, 1981; Yin, 2017). This method can enable better understanding of the needs of research participants and their organisations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Case study methodology is based on investigating related situations – the differences between "what was planned and what actually occurred" (Noor, 2008, p. 1602), thus the paper seeks to gain insights into how the activities of ASST were experienced, which may inform decolonising design practices. The case study will consider how the user experiences of the research participants can enable sustainable services that drive participation in arts and design in postcolonial contexts. Primary data was collected from interviews while secondary data was retrieved from desktop search. The use of interviews enabled an analysis of the participants' expectations and enabling the Trust to gain an understanding of their experiences. The primary data was collected in two phases from two different focus groups. The selection of these two groups was motivated by the current collaboration of the Trust with Namibian and Australian arts organisations in facilitating artists from both countries. Data collection tools used were semi-structured interviews focusing on the perceptions, needs, expectations and past experiences. The participants and the researcher were geographically dispersed between Australia, Africa and Europe, resulting in the need to conduct interviews via mobile phone and the internet, lasting 20 to 40 minutes per interview.

The required ethical considerations for seeking appropriate consent and de-identification were followed as the research was conducted in a postcolonial context. Two focus groups were interviewed. The first focus group consisted of five participants at management level of various organisations, such as Trustees, gallery or program managers from different arts organisations that collaborated with the Trust. Thus, one participant from all the Trust's partner organisations between 2013 and 2015 contributed to the research. The second focus group consisted of ten participants, including past and present beneficiaries of the Trust from various demographic groups. The sample size represents more than 70 percent of the Trust's total beneficiaries since

its inception, but this number is not representative of the Namibian arts and design world. Interpretation of the qualitative data from the interviews were used to develop theme-oriented readings of the data. This generated complementary responses from participants, the data, which were treated simultaneously as a resource and a topic for exploration (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Thus, systematic open coding (Burnard, 1991; Berg, 1989) was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns within the data.

### *Findings focus group 1: Need for awareness and open dialogue*

Organisations that supported ASST usually negotiated three complex cultural market segments that includes a) artists, designers and groups; b) donor and partner organisations; and c) the wider audiences. The views of the audiences were excluded from this research as ASST's services are rather targeted towards Namibian and Australian participants and organisations. Participants from focus group one understood the role of ASST to provide opportunities for Namibian participants in facilitating cultural collaboration, artist residencies, exchange and product sales. Two participants in this group believe that the role of ASST depends on its future vision. Collaboration opportunities included the facilitation of art workshops, residencies, exhibitions, skills training workshops and participation in art prizes, markets and fairs. This focus group further understood the role ASST as to assists Australian and Namibian based organisations to facilitate participants' exchanges between both countries while retaining both regional and urban foci. Services that were valued and needs identified by partner organisations were the consultative services received such as the identification of participants for selection in residencies and exchanges. One participant from focus group two said: "I would have no idea that such talented participants existed in Namibia if it wasn't through the Trust and I also would have no idea where to look for these participants" (participant, Port Augusta, 2016).

The motivations for participation were that ASST succeeded in mobilising funding opportunities for activities and programmes, and continued to assist participants with art and design services related to exposure. Additional motivation for collaboration was the research and publication focus of ASST as well as more practical skills development, training and consultation services. A participant from a partner organisation in Australia mentioned that "benefits for regional galleries and participants are huge as they are often inward focussed and lack broader and international exposure and the cultural collaborations offer inspiring experiences that motivate participants to explore new ideas, techniques and experiences to grow professionally" (participant, Port Augusta, 2016). The participant added that "the Trust achieves outcomes despite limited funding which is a creative process in itself as the Trust's management team has attitudes that are conducive to creative problem solving" (participant, Port Augusta, 2016).

Expectations of ASST from focus group one, the arts and design organisations, were to uphold communication, to share costs of activities, provide advice and guidance to both Namibian and Australian partner organisations in areas of nominating suitable participants for collaborations and exchanges. Additional expectations of ASST were to enable the participants to grow through the facilitation of artist exchanges, residencies, artist talks, workshops, skills development, learning and professional development opportunities, including gallery visits and to liaise with the Namibian Ministry of Education, Art and Culture (MOEAC) to design creative strategies and SME development. Another participant from an Australian partner organisation commented that "[their] expectations are to enter into open dialogue so that there are honest selection processes so that [they] can find common goals" (participant, Adelaide, 2016). This participant also commented that the "de-motivators would be a lack of open discussion" (participant, Adelaide, 2016).

Moreover, a participant from a Namibian partner organisations suggested that the "ASST has expertise in and a focus on Namibian Indigenous knowledge in arts and design and this potential should be harnessed to market Indigenous arts, create employment and uplift Indigenous communities" (participant, Windhoek, 2016). Another argued that "benefitting participants should be more proactive in delivering informative talks, sharing information about their residencies and experiences – this should be a requirement of the Trust" (participant, Whyalla, 2016). Two others suggested that the Trust be more involved in consultancy and research activities as it will benefit the larger Namibian art world and attract attention from donor organisations. One added that "collaboration with academic institutions is valuable as it steers away from purely artist-focussed activities, moving the focus to regional and marginal communities instead" (participant, Whyalla, 2016).

A participant from Namibia identified various needs of the Namibian government related to the arts, such as providing expertise to educate, arts curriculum development for Namibian schools and consultancy that would lead to growing Namibian urban and regional arts communities. The participant mentioned that there is a

need for manpower and experts that have program knowledge to provide quality consultancy to individual participants, craftspeople, designers and art, craft and design groups, businesses and organisations in order to sustainably grow Namibian art” (participant, Windhoek, 2016). Additional suggestions were to engage with MEAC to develop materials and publications for schools and the wider public to stimulate audience participation in the arts in Namibia. Although these are valid needs that were identified, some of these expectations were unrealistic considering ASST is a small private Trust with limited resources.

### *Findings focus group 2: Plural identities and textured worlds*

The data collected from this focus group illustrated the complex social, economic and cultural environments in which the participants live and function. The participants from focus group two were from various age groups - later twenties to early sixties. They earned monthly incomes that varied between less than NAD 5,000 and more than NAD 25,000. Six participants generate (mostly their primary) income through art teaching and lecturing, one worked as an arts administrator and another as an arts and design proprietor, while two worked in fields that are not related to the arts. All participants use the internet more than five times per day, while only one use the internet more than five times per week. The participants access the internet through their personal and work computers, mobile phones and tablets, which indicates their active connection to local, regional and global digital and social networks. Most work from personal computers and mobile phones while just over half of the group use work computers. Only two used tablets.

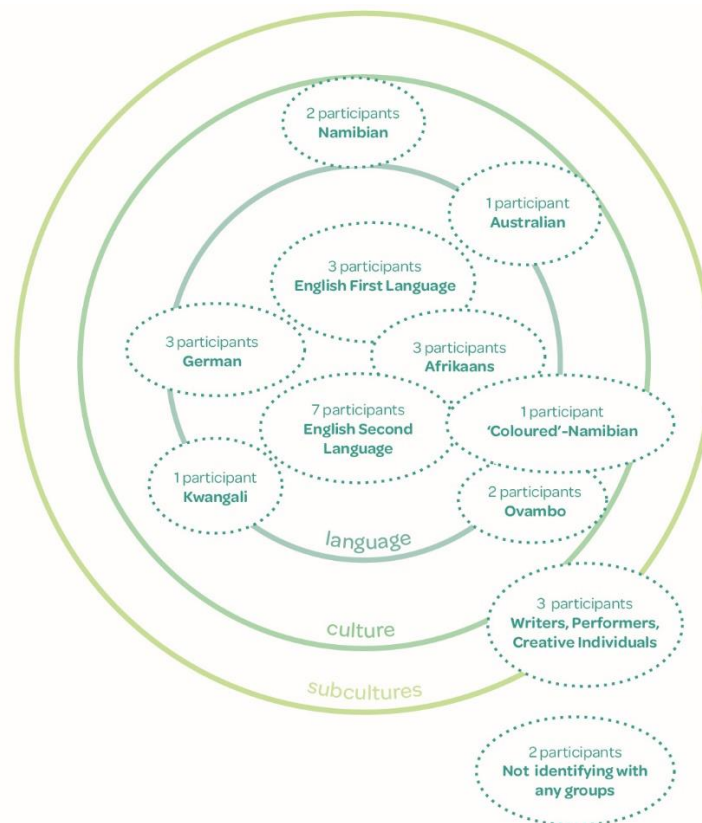


Figure 1: The fluid and plural cultural landscapes of focus group two. source: Beaulé and Sarantou 2019

The participants had multiple fluid and layered creative and cultural identities and roles (Figure 1). Only ten participants were interviewed, but their identities were mixed and overlapping. For example, seven participants identified as artists, while six identified as designers, four as makers, one as an artisan and another as a painter. Participants identify with diverse and hybrid cultural backgrounds. The ones mentioned were Namibian, Ovambo, Kavango, ‘Coloured’-Namibian, English-Namibian and German. Two participants preferred not to identify with any cultural group or subgroup. Only three participants use English as their first languages and others used were Oshivambo, Kwangali, Afrikaans and German. Figure 1 illustrates the interconnected, plural and layered identity formations of the participants.



Expectations of focus group two were to promote Namibian artists and designers globally through sustainable links with art and design organisations, providing feedback to participants and the broadening of knowledge and experiences. Sustained engagement with international markets, efficient, yet flexible and agile management protocols were suggested. A Namibian participant suggested that “it will be great if contracts are in place that address the selling, commissioning, shipping, administrative and taxing arrangements of the work” (participant, Windhoek, 2016). An Australian participant expressed expectations: “The opportunity to work alongside international participants, to build an understanding of their cultural backgrounds, including artwork which stems from these cultural backgrounds” (participant, Adelaide, 2016).

The motivations for participation of group two were the promotional opportunities that ASST globally through sustainable networks with arts organisations. ASST provides feedback and new networks to participants, thus broadening their knowledge and experiences, while it also engages with and educates Australian audiences about Namibian arts and design. A Namibian participant identified as demotivating “too demanding programs, and a loss of energy and drive when one person gets too overburdened, and ASST coming up with ideas and projects that do not materialise” (participant, Windhoek, 2016).



*Figure 2: Namibian artist Petrus Amuthenu demonstrating his cardboard printing technique to South Australian Aboriginal Artist Sherrie Jones during a cultural exchange workshop at Arts Ceduna in South Australia. The initiative was supported by ASST, Country Arts SA, Streaky Bay Regional Council and Streaky Bay Tourism. source: Sarantou 2016*



Needs, wishes and ambitions of the Namibian artists and designers were identified, especially those related to the recognition and exploration of plural and changing identities of the artists and designers. More fundamental needs included the fostering of an understanding for the work and artists and designers, having respect and stay true to the vision of the artists and designers and not trying to change their identities or those of their works. Participants indicated obvious needs that relate to good working relationships, getting the art and design “out there” through good management and marketing practices. Important needs also included the artists and designers in the processes, providing feedback, be reliable and flexible and assist with digital-based exposure that compliments the work. The participants pronounced resistance against the usual service systems that only focus on profits.

The needed services identified by the participants were the marketing and selling of work, the availability of platforms to showcase work, and assistance with the development of promotional tools. The participants acknowledged that arts and design services require expert knowledge as they are not regularly consumed products. The participants also noted that the services should be as creative as the products. All participants think that cultural exchange is a potential service that enables exposure, the sharing of new ideas, knowledge, techniques and approaches, next to fringe benefits that may include travelling, product sales, opportunities to teach and conduct training workshops (Figure 2). Knowledge is shared back in the home country with other artists and designers, which prevents isolation and encourages cross pollination of best practices.

Benefits of working via a service agents included the reaching and connection with wider audiences and networks, thus growing marketing platforms. The challenges of employing a service agent would be that participants are more removed from selling process and this may impact negatively on the product, whilst service approaches that are limited to a profit focus were thought to be unsuitable. The negative perceptions of arts and design services (e.g. marketing) were that they are a nuisance, taking up too much mental space and energy that should be invested in making/producing arts and design, while they are time consuming and expensive to develop. Participants lacked the expertise to promote themselves successfully, because art and design is often personal. Moreover, Namibian markets are limited due the country’s relative small population, thus participants are frustrated by the lack of arts and design services in the country. It was widely acknowledged that Namibian markets are often informal, as wide cohort of Namibian artists and designers do not take business very seriously.

## Discussion

The partner organisation that collaborated with the Trust, highlighted the need for awareness of Namibian arts and design that can be supported by timely, continuing and open discussion. Two of the authors, who are experienced in working with this world, can report that this is often not the case. Communication and open discussions within the Namibian arts and design world falls short between institutions and individuals due to the power structures. One of the primary shortcomings of this world are the limited funding and representational opportunities for artists and designers. With the National Arts Council of Namibia (NACN) currently being the primary funding body of all art forms, and considering the limitations to national funding, many individuals are demotivated to engage in open discourse or participation in the arts. For example, artists report that they are not participating in the annual NACN funding round as they lack information about the funding and find the application process overwhelming and tedious (Shapwanale, 2014). Again, the authors, who are experienced and have been successful in seeking arts funding, can report that, compared to funding application procedures in Europe and Australia, those of the NACN match in timeliness and have similar requirements.

Many additional power structures play a role in this world, and apart from the more obvious struggles with Namibia’s social, political and economic realities, other challenges relate to institutional politics and gatekeeping in the arts that cannot be denied. At government level the drive for policy implementation and deep insights into the realities of the Namibian arts and design world lacks. For example, research has illustrated the weakness of the Namibian arts and design market due to a small population and an overflow of foreign artefacts (Sarantou, 2014). However, in performance agreement between the Namibian government and the MOEAC, arts and culture is only promoted nationally and regionally, but not internationally (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2017). Such inward-looking approaches stifle new and sustainable development opportunities for this world and that of Namibian artists and designers who mostly are marginalised economically and socially. The ongoing lack of knowledge about the talent that Namibian artists and designers have, as the data of this paper illustrates, further undermines the sustainability of this world and its

practitioners. It is thus clear that the Namibian arts and design world, especially at institutional level, is in need of structural change in order to meet the needs of its local users. The data collected in the case study demonstrates an opportunity to use service design as a catalyst for sustainable development of creative industries through improved services that enable viable economic and social models through decolonising methodologies.

The Namibian artists and designers had to manage their multiple identities as they are relatively transcendent, fluid, overlapping and context sensitive (Lawler, 2008; Appiah, 2007). They negotiate and make sense of their identities through complex processes, such as combining and changing identities, which are not necessarily clear-cut and smooth. Many have to navigate their life realities that are continuously influenced by postcolonial histories (Sarantou, 2014). Many individuals negotiate contradicting identities and roles, since they are formed between, rather than within persons (Lawler, 2008). The Namibian artists and designers are immersed in specific social, economic and environmental contexts that are influenced by institutional power structures and the sad reality of social stratification, alas the result of class rather than race-based segregation after the abandoning of the Apartheid regime in Namibia (Winterfeldt, 2010). The participants live their lives as they unfold into the myriad pathways of their textured worlds and art and design practices.

Unsurprisingly, Namibian artists and designers are well-connected to the internet with mobile phones being the most popular tool for having access. Due to the usual lack of fast and efficient shifts in institutional and organisational life, the internet and digital participation offers new opportunities to this world. The threats posed by the internet to privacy and copyright issues are widely acknowledged, yet in the stifling institutional environment of this world, Namibian artists need to rely more on their own resourcefulness and development. It is here that improvisation, co-creation and service design offer new opportunities to this world. New digitally-enabled services can be developed reasonably inexpensively with the help of the internet through avenues such as social media, blogs, websites and sales platforms. Moreover, improvisation opens the door for processes to include different ways of knowing and being, through the involvement of multiple stakeholders and users. This will enable the shift from colonised minds and bodies (Nandy, 1989) into decolonising practices into the sphere of innovation and resourcefulness. Important to mention, however, is that Namibian digital sales platforms that currently exist are undermined by the power structures associated with the Namibian shipping industries that are working predominantly in sync with the South African transport ecosystem. Thus, the costs for international consumers of Namibian art and design is phenomenal. For example, a printed work with a price tag of NAD 1500.00 will have a shipping cost of NAD 2800.00 (START Art Gallery, 2019). These cost structures can be verified by the authors who dealt extensively with the shipping of Namibian artefacts. Here is one example of a challenge that may shift from having a negative impact to a new opportunity for participatory service design and improvisation to solve incompatibilities and enable long term survival strategies (Richards, 2016).

The paper presents a practical framework that seeks to enable sustainable practices, resourcefulness and long term survival strategies. Hence, a practical framework for decolonising practices in Namibian art and design is to:

- Decolonise art and design worlds through a mindful and enacted shift from stifling institutions to a willingness to erode and fight power structures associated with institutionalisation. This includes working against rigid gender, traditionalist and inward-focused ideologies sedimented in Namibian government and institutions and which restrain open discourse and co-creation. Additionally, the minds and bodies of Namibian arts and design practitioners need to be ongoingly decolonised from the oppressive social and economic shortcomings that are presented by everyday life, towards proactively engaging in initiatives that focus on local knowledge and culture.
- Embrace service design as a solution to and implement new service strategies that are based on plural avenues, digital participation and technology-driven solutions. The participatory potential of service design should be used to explore different avenues and drive the inclusion of Namibian arts and design into an international arena. Decolonising design innovation methods should also be used in order to acknowledge and include local and already existing innovation processes. Because these are still emerging practices, this case study could help develop decolonising design methodologies.
- Acknowledge the importance of narratives and digital storytelling in rendering audible and visible Namibian artists and designers by the sharing of Namibian local knowledge and culture according to the terms of the artists and designers, such as “our cultural significances that is told by us and explained by ourselves”. Digital storytelling and connectedness to new (virtual) networks will get

Namibian artists and designers 'out there' so that their talents can be harnessed for new economic opportunities.

- Adopt bottom-up approaches and the role of improvisation and knowledge stemming from local contexts and from there on, develop and publish best practices charters as some artists have unrealistic expectations from support organisations (Shapwanale, 2014). The new initiatives (mentioned above) should be improvised as the approach incorporates, by definition, ongoing learning, experimenting and fine-tuning of results, which fosters approaches that are based on local knowledge and culture.
- Engage in the fight against exclusion through open and ongoing discussion in addition to embracing co-creation amongst artist and designers. An equally local and international focus will build new networks and markets as the focus will be on mutual enactment of goals and strategies. The impact of digital participation in addressing the needs for connectedness amongst marginalised communities is illustrated in the literature (Davis, Waycott & Schleser, 2019; Sarantou; Akimenko & Escudeiro, 2018).
- Foster capacity building in areas of service design, digital participation (including digital business management and marketing) and digital storytelling. This may enable the control over processes that many of the participants mentioned as a pitfall for having marketing agents and other 'outsider' service providers involved.
- Engage in ongoing research that embrace arts-based approaches and narratives. These approaches will be suited to the cultural complexities and mixed identities that many Namibian artists and designers deal with ongoingly. The research should impact policy development in a variety of sectors in Namibia, but it will also address the lack of deep insights and understanding within this world.

## Conclusion

Sustainable participation of Namibian practitioners in arts and design can be enabled through improvised processes, participatory service design that harnesses the potential of technological and digital tools and processes. Opportunities for service design, based on co-creative approaches, may offer new opportunities if the narratives and stories of Namibian artists and designers are diffused and dispersed, impacting on and stimulating new initiatives for products and services. Service design based on digital participation will also harness new economic opportunities whilst the cultural meanings of the Namibian arts and design world will be explained through vocalised and visible initiatives. Current on-line marketing and sales initiatives are limited by weak shipment infrastructures compared to global networks, which needs remedy.

The kind of design practices that enable decolonising processes with local Namibian communities include improvised processes that focus on local knowledge and culture and acknowledging their existing innovation processes. Additional practices are those focusing on services that address colonial organisational structures upholding traditionalism that do not sufficiently stimulate improvisation and experimentation practices that usually derive from the bottom up. Weak funding structures for arts and culture results from weak policy implementation. Decolonising design is an avenue for new service solutions, self-determination and acting through self-selected avenues. Suitable multi-channel strategies need to be developed by the artists and designers themselves. The strategies could be based on plural avenues, including those of self-services and network building, to sustain this world. Art and design managers should adopt decolonising practices in arts and design representation. Their focus on contributing to the capacity building of practitioners, encouraging bottom-up approaches that answer to local solutions, and the facilitation of sustainable services for sustaining this world, are pressing needs.

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